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V.M. OBAIDULLAH – A FORMIDABLE PEOPLES LEADER FROM VELLORE

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Abstract:

V.M. Obaidullah a secular Nationalist among the Muslim freedom fighters of Tamil Nadu vigorously took part in almost all national movements in India. He followed Gandhi's ideology of non-violence during his participation in the Indian National movement. His name was frequently expressed with other National freedom fighters of India like Dr. PattabhiSittaramayya, T.S.Pattabiraman, Kamarajar, Dr. Ansari, Moulana AbulKalamAzath etc., V.M. Obaidullah, a formidable National leader of Vellore his forefathers hailed from Vaniyambadi and settled at Vellore. He influenced the public masses through his oratorical skills in the public meetings and made the freedom struggle of Vellore as a mass movement. V.M. Obaidullah and Kamarajar was a close friend for nearly two decades and Obaidullah also lived and died like a Kamarajar, sacrificed everything for the cause of Nationalism and Nation. He tilted the election results favourable to Kamarajar by using his influence among the masses in Vellore once. Jawaharlal Nehru conveyed his thanks to V.M. Obaidullah through a letter to the then Chief Minister of Madras province for his service. His services to the nation is memorable one but started disappearing from all historical records. His second generation heir is not aware about his tireless service even. His services to the nation placed in all international Medias like World Heritage Encyclopaedia, world eBook Libraries etc., as Indian Muslims and freedom fighters of India but diminishing in

regional level. The purpose of this paper is to highlight the selfless services of V.M. Obaidullah to our Indian nation.

Keywords:

Muslim freedom fighter, V.M. Obaidullah of Vellore, Vaniyambadi, Swadeshi Movement, Khilafat Movement, Home Rule Movement, Satyagraha, Anti-Simon agitation, Civil Disobedience Movement, Two Nation theory, Anti-partition agitation, Quit India Movement, Rajya Sabha Member, Vellore Fort Temple, Jalakandeewarar Temple and Palar river.

Introduction:

V.M. Obaidullah, a secular Nationalist of Tamil Nadu participated in almost all the movements in freedom struggle till the achievement of Independence in 1947. His services to the nation is undisputable in the history of the Indian National Movement. From his childhood onwards, he was inspired by the ideas of freedom from the various national leaders and freedom fighters of our nation. He followed Gandhi's ideology of non-violence during his participation in the Indian National movement. He was one among the prominent leaders of Tamil Nadu, who influenced the public masses during Indian National Movement. His oratorical skills in the public meetings made the freedom struggle of Vellore as a mass movement. His emotional speeches provoked the people to protest against the British atrocities in North Arcot District. A leading personality among the Muslim freedom fighters

in the North Arcot District, V.M. Obaidullahsahib of Velloresacrificed everything for the cause of Indian Nationalism¹. The purpose of this paper is to highlight the selfless services of V.M. Obaidullah to India.

His early career:

V.M. Obaidullah was born at Vellore on 2nd May 1905. His father was Madhar Batcha Sahib, who was engaged in betel-nut business in Vellore and his mother was Rabiya Basri alias Bijuma. Oral History of Vellore region says that his family hailed from Vaniyambadi. At a very young age, he was inspired by the great Indian National Leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Moulana Mohammed Ali, Soukath Ali, Abul Kalam Azad, Dr. Ansari, Nehru etc., who fought against the British rule in India. As a young boy, he was more interested to mingle with the freedom fighters of Vellore district than his business. He was literate and voluntarily drop out from the school due to the thirst of freedom. At the age of 15, in the year 1920 onwards he was involved with Kodai Idi Kuppusamy (thunderstorm of summer), a vibrant nationalist in Vellore, in organising meetings, processions, rally etc. and both of them were called by the general public as “Twins of Vellore”. His courage and valour in his speech in the public meetings was inspiring. His Urdu mixed Tamil was elegant, informative and thought provoking. The statistical and explanatory notes about the British atrocities on Indians, attracted the masses of the North Arcot district to march against the British rule in this region. His satire and sportive speech in the public meetings made the audience keep thinking about their servitude under British rule, which hooked and pulled the peoples of this region to participated in our freedom struggle.

His role in Freedom Struggle:

Strong protests and slogans against British were raised everywhere during Swadeshi

Movement. Protest meetings were organised by V.M. Obaidullah of Vellore which aroused the anti-British feelings among the peoples of Tamilnadu and intensified their nationalist sentiments.² V.M. Obaidullah was spreading the message of Home Rule in many rural areas of Vellore district³.

He joined Khilafath movement in 1920 and actively took part in the movement. Nawab C. Abdul Hakkeem and V.M. Obaidullah Sahib spoke in the mass meeting of approximately 20,000 gathering in Marina Beach opposite to the Presidency College at Madras in the Second Khilafat Day on 19th March 1920 organised by Khilafat Committee. He toured every village in North Arcot district and provoked the masses to protest against the British rule. The young and energetic V.M. Obaidullah's valour and vibrant speech attracted him to all over Tamilnadu by the regional leaders to create awareness about freedom of the Indians, and made involve the peoples actively in India's freedom struggle. He created a renaissance among the masses of Tamilnadu. He started a Gandhi Sangam at Vellore and organised meetings, processions and spread the national spirit among the youths of North Arcot district.

In 1923, V.M. Obaidullah participated in the flag agitation on the advice of C. Rajagopalachari and imprisoned in Nagapuri jail and again shifted to Amaravati jail for rigorous imprisonment by the British government⁴. V.M. Obaidullah lead the masses of youngsters, students, Congress volunteers etc., in Vellore and raised a thundered voice as “Go Back Simon” during Anti-Simon agitation. The police had detained the masses of the protestation and ordered to disperse immediately to save their lives from their bullets and pointed their bayonet on V.M. Obaidullah's heart, he immediately tore off his shirt and bravely shown his chest straight to the gunpoint to shoot

him⁵. This shows that he was ready to sacrifice his life for the cause of India's freedom. V.M. Obaidullah Sahib of Vellore travelled the districts of Tamilnadu and appealed to the masses to join the Civil Disobedience Movement and strengthened the cause of nationalism.⁶

But he was imprisoned eighteen months for this cause in 1930⁷. He actively participated in the salt satyagraha processions of 100 volunteers, along with Kodai Idi Kuppasamy Mudaliyar and Shanmughanandha Adigal. The procession went on walk to Chennai and was supported and encouraged by the public masses in every village on the way. In every village the peoples encouraged the procession with tea, snacks and food. A lot of volunteers voluntarily joined in this procession. V.M. Obaidullah participated the salt satyagraha at Chennai with all these volunteers. The British government convicted him with eighteen months' imprisonment at Alipuram jail, near Bellary for this action along with Kamaraj⁸.

Civil Disobedience Movement was a peaceful protest held all over India. The volunteers of the protest were brutally attacked by the police, V.M. Obaidullah was also one of the victim of this attack and also convicted with one-year imprisonment by the British Indian court⁹. He was released from imprisonment and invited to speak at several villages and towns in Tamilnadu.

He accepted the invitation and went to several villages and motivated the public through his inspiring speech. S.S. Viswanatha Dassa drama artist, who portrayed dramas with the theme of freedom struggle and sung a famous Nationalist song "kukkuparukkudhadipappa" was familiar among the public masses of Tamilnadu. V.M. Obaidullah bravely invited him to hoist the tri coloured National flag in Vellore Municipal office,

when he was a Municipal Councillor of Vellore during British rule. V.M. Obaidullah of Vellore, the President of TNCS in 1941, was vehemently critical of the creation of Pakistan¹⁰. The Muslim leaders at the national level convened an anti-separation conference at Kumbakonam in June 1941 and passed a resolution against the partition of India, V.M. Obaidullah was one among them with Madurai Maulana Sahib and Syed Murtaza of Tiruchirappalli¹¹. V.M. Obaidullah arrested under the Security Act and spent 26 months' imprisonment in Coimbatore, Vellore and Thanjavur respectively during Quit India Movement in 1942.

Various Positions He held:

He served as a Municipal Councillor of Vellore for over 20 years, Vice President North Arcot District Board for four years, Vice President of T.N.C.C for seven years, President Tamilnadu Congress Committee during 1940-41, Tamilnadu Congress Executive for over 17 years, Member in A.I.C.C for ten years, Member of the Standing Committee for the Ministry of Transport (other than Roads) from 1950-1951¹², Member of Provincial Parliament during 1951-52, Member of the Council of States, Madras Presidency¹³ from 3rd April, 1952 to 2nd April, 1956¹⁴ and the Member of the Rajya Sabha¹⁵ from 3rd April, 1956 to 21st February, 1958, re-elected to the Rajya Sabha and continued till the time of his death¹⁶.

His Services in Independent India:

The Sri Jalakandeeswarar Temple inside the historic fort in Vellore fort had stopped worship for nearly four centuries and the main deity 'Linga' was shifted to the Jalakanda Vinayakar Temple in Sathuvacheri. The Vellore Fort was handed over to the ASI for maintenance in the year 1921 and the status quo of the temple continued after independence. V.M. Obaidullah of Vellore raised

this issue in the 15th session of Rajya Sabha on 18th December, 1956¹⁷ during question hours and insisted to open the temple for the public to perform puja. The other Members P.S.Rajagopal Naidu, T.V.Kamalaswamy, S.N.Mazumdar, B.B. Sharma and Dawood Ali Mirza argued and supported the cause of V.M. Obaidullah, while the then Deputy Minister for Education Dr. Mono Mohan-Das quoting other reasons to justify the status quo of non-opening the Jalakandeewarar Temple to perform puja. The worship was revived in the temple on March 16, 1981 and the first Kumbabhishekam of the temple was performed in 1982 after a prolonged struggle of two and half decades initiated by V.M. Obaidullah.

Palar river originates in the NandhDurg Hills of Kolar district in Karnataka and flows 93 kilometres in Karnataka, 33 Kilometres in Andhra Pradesh and 222 Kilometres in Tamil Nadu, before confluence in to the Bay of Bengal at Vayalur, which is situated approximately 100 kilometres south of Chennai. it flows through Vellore and Kanchipuram. The Palar river is the only source of irrigation for agriculture in Vellore, Kanchipuram and Madras etc., and the chief towns Ramanaickenpet, Vaniyambadi, Ambur, Melpatti, Gudiyatham, Pallikonda, Melmonavoor, Vellore, Katpadi, Melvisharam, Arcot, Ranipet, Walajapet, Kanchipuram, Walajabad, Chengalpet, Kalpakkam farmers were by this water source. The difference of opinion raised between the Madras and Mysore government about the supply of irrigation water through palar river in the year 1956. V.M. Obaidullah raised the issue of supply of irrigation water from Mysore to Madras through Palar River in the 15th session of Rajya Sabha on 20th December, 1956 during question hours¹⁸. He insisted the government to provide Financial Assistance to CMC, Vellore¹⁹ and the Opening of Gandhi Maidan, open ground around the Vellore

fort for public meetings²⁰ was banned during freedom struggle, and for the remodelling of Virudhunagar railway station²¹.

His Death:

He passed away on 21st February 1958²², at the age of 53. He was a sitting member of the Rajya Sabha when he passed away²³. After his death when the Tamil Nadu Government requested his wife Mrs. Zaibunisa Begum to accept some free land, she refused and declared that the service of her husband was invaluable and beyond any reward or award²⁴. The main Bus Stand in Vellore named after V.M. Obaidullah Bus Stand to honour him for his yeoman services to Indian Nation.

An obituary reference message was recorded in our Lok Sabha on Monday, 24th February, 1958 as *"He was a good Tamil Orator. Though he started his political career, while he was quite young, he did a lot of propaganda for the country's cause, and he suffered immensely though he was poor. Irrespective of his poverty and his incapacity to suffer, he did suffer, and went to jail as often as it was necessary, and fought bravely"*²⁵.

Conclusion:

He worked for the ideals of Gandhiji, Hindu-Muslim unity, communal harmony, and the prosperity of India. He wore only Khadar and lived a simple life. He strove for the cause of freedom of our nation. The peoples of North Arcot district carried on their nationalist struggle against the British with greater dedication to the incessant appeals and clarion call of the leaders like V.M. Obaidullah Sahib. His dedication for the cause of Nation in various stages are noteworthy and should be memorable in the history of Tamilnadu, but a meagre information's only recorded in the history of Indian freedom movement about him. So, the young scholars of history should

concentrate, to record the unrecorded contribution of the regional leaders and dig out the real facts about our freedom struggle in this current scenario. In fact, it is the concrete efforts of the peoples from all over India to break the feathery of the foreign yoke, that finally won for India its independence should record in the history of our Nation.

Summary:

V.M. Obaidullah, a secular nationalist among the Freedom Fighters of Tamil Nadu, hailed from a moderate middle class merchant family dealing with betel-nut business in Vellore. He participated in almost all the movements like Khilafat Movement, Swadeshi Movement, Home Rule Movement, Nagpur Flag Agitation, Anti-Simon Demonstration, Civil Disobedience Movement, Salt Satyagraha, Anti-Two Nation Theory and Quit India Movement etc., in India's freedom struggle till the achievement of Independence in 1947. Santimay Ray states that in his book entitled "*Freedom Movement and Indian Muslims*", Peoples Publishing House (P) Ltd, New Delhi, 1979, p.p 53-54, as "*V.M.Obaidullah of Vellore was another great fighter who suffered years of imprisonment during national struggle since 1930*". His satire and sportive speech in the public meetings made the audience keep thinking about their servitude under British rule, which hooked and pulled the peoples of this region to participate in our freedom struggle. A contemporary freedom fighter from Arakonam, V. Rajagopalan stated in his preface to the "*SudhanthiraPorilVadarkadu Mavattam*" (Tamil), Congress Centenary Celebration Souvenir in 17-08-1985, who is the convener of the Publication committee as "*.....following the leaders like V.M. Ubaidullah in North Arcot district, I participated in the Revolutionary war of 1942 concluding that "The freedom of the Country is the only goal of my*

life". In free India, as a member of Rajya Sabha, he served for the Hindus religious cause for the opening of Vellore Fort temple for Public to perform puja, which was prohibited for nearly four centuries, Palar river dispute, Government aid to CMC, Vellore and remodelling of Virudhunagar Railway station etc., As a true public leader of the masses of Tamil Nadu, he leads a simple life like Kamarajar and breathed his last as like the Chief minister of Tamil Nadu Annadurai.

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